

RECRUITING VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

BY:

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ABSTRACT

Clark County Fire District Number 12 (CCFD 12) has seen a steady decline in its volunteer members. The district has (and will for some time in the future) relied on volunteers as an integral part of their emergency response/citizen service team.

This paper used an evaluative research method to discover why people volunteer for a fire department. The purpose of this research project was to specifically identify why people volunteer for an organization and whether there were specific reasons a potential volunteer would choose to apply to a fire department. The research further attempted to determine which items, from a list of 15 different choices, would encourage a person to join a volunteer fire department.

Various literature writings were reviewed to gain an understanding on why people volunteer. To prioritize reasons that would encourage a person to volunteer for a fire department, a survey was sent to 225 residents in the City of La Center.

The survey indicated that the most often chosen reasons to join a volunteer fire department all dealt with helping others or helping the community. None of the top reasons chosen for volunteering dealt with people's basic needs i.e., food, shelter, clothing, etc.

The paper recommended that CCFD 12 evaluate its recruitment procedures, keying in on certain types of people and certain untapped groups of people. Finally, the paper cautioned the district not to spend too much time on people with certain profiles, as they would probably not turn out to be good volunteers.

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INTRODUCTION

Volunteer firefighters have been the backbone of the fire service for over three hundred-sixty years. They have been a part of much change during this time period. They have trained only to be retrained. They have learned only to relearn. No volunteer group, in the history of this country, has had to work so hard and sacrifice so much as have the volunteer firefighters. (Johnson, Snook, and Olsen, 1998, p. i)

Today in many volunteer and combination fire departments one of the major questions asked when members discuss the future concerns the increasing difficulty in finding new volunteers. A trend appears to be developing whereby volunteer retirement continues as in the past but new members are getting more difficult to recruit and retain.

There appear to be many reasons why people do not volunteer as readily as in the past. One of the main reasons may be that many people simply do not have the time. As life moves faster and faster, they find themselves with less free time. In many homes both spouses work full-time. When you add children with their multitude of after school and weekend activities, work and families take up most free time.

In today's sue-happy society being a volunteer is no longer an acceptable defense in court. Volunteers are held to a higher standard of professionalism than in the past. This results in the need for more training and consequently more time commitment from a volunteer.

Federal, state, and local governments have buried fire departments under blankets of rules and laws. Some of these new laws were needed to encourage departments to operate more safely. Some were written because the legislators needed to write a new law. The final result is the same; more time commitments and documentation for a volunteer.

HIV, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis, and a host of other deadly and debilitating diseases have reared their heads. For all firefighters the risks of helping people have increased. Specifically, for the volunteer firefighter, time commitment has again increased with new required classes covering infectious diseases and protection from these diseases. There are now requirements for immunity inoculations and yearly testing to monitor a firefighter's health. Finally, there is the never ending documentation.

In the past many volunteer firefighters responded to wood frame structure fires. While these fires were dangerous, they were somewhat predictable. Today houses, factories, transportation vehicles, and whatever else fire fighters respond to are filled with space age products. Furnishings burn faster and hotter. Burning products release dangerous and/or fatal gases. Once again the need for more training hours increases.

The decreasing availability of volunteers raises serious concerns for many fire departments. In many areas there is not a sufficient tax base to support a wholly paid department. Even in many areas that have paid departments there is still a need for a volunteer force during times of heavy demand for emergency services.

The purpose of this research is to determine reasons a person would volunteer for a fire department. This study uses an evaluative research method. The research questions asked by this paper are:

1. Why do people volunteer?
2. Are their specific reasons a person would volunteer for a fire department?
3. Of a selected group of possible reasons to join a volunteer fire department, which reasons have the greatest influence to encourage a person to volunteer?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Stewart (1982) points out that the attraction to the fire service is an American tradition dating back to Ben Franklin's first fire department in the United States. Over the years millions of people in the United States have chosen the fire department in their towns as the one organization they most like to belong to as a member.

Clark County Fire District Number 12's (CCFD 12) history starts in 1962 with a small group of volunteers who went door to door seeking donations to and support for a rural fire department. After a successful formation election, this group began the task of recruiting and training a volunteer membership. Their recruitment efforts were easy as most people in the rural community were accustomed to helping their neighbors in times of need.

Over the years CCFD 12'S community grew; their rural flavor changing to a more suburban community. Expensive homes sprang up in the rural settings with owners who moved from areas where their fire departments were often fully paid. Business and industry appeared at major freeway interchanges. The one lane interstate changed to a three lane freeway with a steady flow of commerce and travelers. The main west coast rail line significantly increased passenger service and commercial freight including hazardous material cargoes. In 1962 CCFD 12 responded to just over 30 fire alarms. In 1997 the department responded to just under 800 alarms ranging from fires to medical to hazardous material emergencies.

The changing future brought a change in the availability of volunteers. Children of area farmers now commute miles to work each day, taking them out of their communities. Farmers have grown old. The days of a fire engine rolling down the back roads with their one red light flashing and siren wailing,

followed by volunteers in their private cars and anyone else available have passed. As Stewart (1982) reminds us “Any volunteer organization can gather warm bodies. Quality and not quantity, though, must be the fundamental requirement for the most dangerous occupations in the world.” (p. 131)

Today the reality is that there is a limited pool of volunteers. Different surveys show that the most frequently cited problem with volunteer programs is finding enough people to volunteer. (Brudney, 1990) Finding and keeping volunteers who are willing to deliver the higher level of service demanded by the public is becoming increasingly difficult. (Sittleburg, 1994)

In a study by the National Commission on Civic Renewal, Bennett and Nunn (1998) conclude “Too many of us have become passive and disengaged. Too many of us lack confidence in our capacity to make basic moral and civic judgments to join with our neighbors to do the work of community, to make a difference. Never have we had so many opportunities for participation, yet rarely have we felt so powerless. In a time that cries out for civic action, we are in danger of becoming a nation of spectators.” (p. 1)

As part of CCFD 12’S ongoing five year planning and goal setting process, the district identified the decreasing volunteer force as a significant problem. Along with volunteers continuing to resign at a constant rate, now the incoming volunteer rate has decreased causing a shortage of volunteers. In 1985 the district had 32 volunteers on their roles. Today that number has dropped to 14. When an emergency alarm sounded during the weekdays in 1985, ten to fifteen volunteers responded from their homes and places of work. Today, when the alarm sounds, it is not uncommon to have only one volunteer arrive at the emergency.

While an increasing tax base has allowed the district to begin hiring full-time firefighters, the district is many years away from not needing volunteers in order to provide a good emergency service level to their citizens. Volunteer recruiting is and must remain a high priority in CCFD 12's future.

This research project ties directly to two chapters of the Executive Development Course of the Executive Fire Officer Program. This paper looks at past and future organizational cultures (Unit 7, Organizational Culture) within CCFD 12 and creative ways to improve the department (Unit 4, Managing Creativity).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why do People Volunteer?

So far as motivational status is concerned, healthy people have sufficiently gratified their basic needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect and self-esteem so that they are motivated primarily by trends to self-actualization (defined as ongoing actualization of potentials, capacities and talents, as fulfillment of missions [or call, fate, destiny, or vocation], as a fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of, the person's own intrinsic nature, as a unceasing trend toward unity, integration or synergy within the person). (Maslow, 1968, p. 25)

People want recognition and praise more than sex and money. Most people do not work just for the money. (Buckman, 1998) Volunteering is not aimed at material gain. It can not be mandated or coerced. (Brudney, 1990) People join organizations that are teams. They want to be associated with programs that are well organized, provide quality patient care, and take care of their volunteers. Volunteers did not join in expectation of financial gain. (Connery, 1990) "If you are currently compensating your volunteers-don't stop. If you are not currently compensating your volunteers-don't

start! There is NO evidence that compensation positively or negatively affects a department's ability to recruit, train, or maintain active volunteers." (Johnson et al., 1998, p. 108)

Wilson (1976) believes that people who volunteer have already met the basic needs identified by Maslow. They meet these needs at their daily jobs. What interests them about volunteering is the desire to meet their higher needs. Volunteering provides an opportunity for new skills, new experiences, challenges, personal development, and other concerns that may not be available at work. Volunteering allows people to express personal values; to do something that will make a difference. (MacLeod, 1993)

Snook and Olsen (1982) agree that work often only meets basic needs. They feel that volunteering allows people to have a sense of belonging to something important, to gain respect, to accept challenges, to gain love and affection, to gain recognition, and to have fun and enjoy one's environment.

Zimmer and Loew (1989) feel people volunteer simply because someone in a leadership position asks them to volunteer. They feel that human nature needs this recognition. People volunteer because they feel they are supporting a worthy cause. A report from the National Volunteer Fire Counsel and the United States Fire Administration (1993) adds that people have a need to belong to something important.

Buckman (1993) divides needs into different categories when he describes why people volunteer. People who volunteer for power oriented needs look to join organizations that provide them an opportunity to create, to take risks, to take on an impossible task, to influence people, and to advise others. People who have a need to affiliate with others often join groups that keep people happy, avoid risks, help others, and work in close cooperation and proximity to others. Finally, those that have a

need to achieve join expecting pressure and hard work, problem solving, challenge, and demands of excellence.

A challenge that arises from this is that these same needs often exist in all people. One will often predominate the others. This predominance may change when circumstances change in an individual's life i.e., marriage, children, divorce, loss of a job, etc.

Another way of categorizing reasons a person might volunteer comes from Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt. (1984) They see forces from within, interpersonal reasons, and situation forces as ways to categorize reasons for volunteering.

There are many forces that drive people from within. They may just desire to have fun or they may wish to be "where the action is". They may wish to learn a new skill or build up a job experience resume. The volunteer position may provide them a break from their daily, boring routine. Perhaps they feel they need to repay a debt to their community for past assistance or it may be as simple as a desire to just do something.

Interpersonal reasons often stem from family traditions, social expectations, the need to be a part of a team, or the inability to refuse the request of a close friend. Volunteers see situation forces as the opportunity for new adventures, new places, new friends, or a different world.

The most effective volunteer recruitment strategy for organizations is the creation of jobs that offer opportunities for enjoyment or challenge, interesting or meaningful work, personal growth, and/or social interaction. (Brudney, 1990) "It is our conclusion that individual volunteers need volunteering just as much as the community needs them." (Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt, 1984, p. 15)

From these writings it appears that people join volunteer organizations to satisfy their higher needs in life. Be volunteering they can seek out challenges and excitement they are not able to find in

their daily jobs. Volunteering allows them to meet new people, do worthy projects, and in general, feel good about themselves.

The writings all agree and strongly stress that people do not join expecting any material gain. Establishing programs that attempt to compensate volunteers are a waste of time and resources.

Are there specific reasons a person would volunteer for a fire department?

Much like other volunteers, people join the volunteer fire service to fulfill human needs that are not met in their careers. (National Volunteer Fire Council and United States Fire Administration, 1993) People join because they have a basic need to feel important, to accomplish something important, and to grow as an individual. (Snook and Olsen, 1982)

Volunteer firefighting draws a focused subsection of the general volunteer population. Mitchell (1986) sees common personality traits in volunteer firefighters that are different from the personality profile of the average volunteer. Volunteer firefighters are action oriented, desiring specific tasks with quick results. They are easily bored and will seek out action when there is none. They like control in their lives and often suppress their emotions in stressful situations. These volunteers enjoy risks and often need to be the center of attention. They strive to do perfect jobs, showing loyalty and dedication to the fire service.

Like other volunteers, volunteer firefighters are not in it for the money. They are a proud group that enjoys doing good things and helping others. They enjoy the closeness of all department members and the social life that revolves around the department. Volunteer firefighters know they are doing something positive with their lives. (Walker, 1986)

Steward (1982) proposes that volunteers exhibit a “Squad 51” outlook on life, being drawn to sirens and flashing lights. They like an element of danger to relieve their daily, routine jobs.

Volunteering for a fire department adds excitement and dimension to their lives. They enjoy the fun of social interactions, picnics, banquets, and firefighter challenges. (Snook and Olsen, 1982)

Although volunteer firefighters join for many of the same reasons as volunteers in other organizations, they appear to be a specialized subsection of all volunteers. They are more drawn to action activities where they can challenge their own physical abilities. When recruiting volunteer firefighters, this information allows a department to focus on specific people who fit this profile.

PROCEDURES

To prepare for this research project several different resources were used. Facts, opinions, and information from books, newspapers, professional journals, magazines, and government commissions were gathered from the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg, Maryland, the Ridgefield branch of the Fort Vancouver Regional Library, Vancouver, Washington, and *The Oregonian* newspaper, Portland, Oregon. The research also used information from a survey conducted in the City of La Center, Washington.

The survey (Appendix A) "Why Citizens Volunteer for the Fire Service" was sent to 225 residents in the City of La Center. The survey was aimed at persons between the ages of 16 and 65, the ages at which a person may volunteer for CCFD 12. The city has a population of 1,325 citizens. A third of the residents are young families who have recently moved into a moderately priced, new subdivision in the city. There are 453 residences within the city limits. The city is a bedroom community to the City of Portland, Oregon, which lies approximately 20 miles south of La Center. Most people living in La Center do not work within the city.

Surveys were randomly mailed to 225 homes. This was accomplished by mailing to every other residence on the city's water bill mailing list. A return addressed, stamped envelope was included with each survey. The cover letter (Appendix 1) sent with the survey requested the survey be given to the resident between the ages of 16 and 65 who would be most interested in volunteering.

The survey attempted to accomplish two tasks. The first page (Appendix A) of the survey asked questions to establish a profile of the person responding to the survey. The survey established the length of residency, age and sex of respondent, level of education, home ownership, marital status, and amount of free time.

The second page (Appendix A) gave the person responding the opportunity to pick which items, from a list of 15 items, would encourage them to join a volunteer fire department. At the bottom of the second page the survey asked whether the respondent would consider volunteering for a volunteer fire department.

The limiting factors on this survey were the number of responses. Out of 225 surveys sent only 75 were returned. It appeared that even with self-addressed, stamped envelopes and a prompt encouraging people to respond immediately, sixty-four percent of the people receiving a survey did not return it. Of those returned, on six surveys only the profile page was completed. Interestingly, a few people responded but only with a response of not wishing to be included in any future surveys.

RESULTS

The survey "Why Citizens Volunteer for the Fire Service" was randomly sent to 225 residences in the City of La Center. The number of surveys returned was 75 or 33%. The purpose of the survey

was to both gather a profile of the persons responding and to allow the person responding to select different reasons that would encourage them to volunteer for a fire department.

The results of the profile are listed below. The most dominant group in each profile question is listed first.

Number of years in La Center

<i>Less than 5 years</i>	<i>74%</i>
<i>Five years or more</i>	<i>26%</i>

Age

<i>22 to 40</i>	<i>63%</i>
<i>Older than 40</i>	<i>34%</i>
<i>16 to 22</i>	<i>3%</i>

Sex

<i>Male</i>	<i>51%</i>
<i>Female</i>	<i>49%</i>

Marital status

<i>Married</i>	<i>68%</i>
<i>Non-married</i>	<i>32%</i>

Homeowner

<i>yes</i>	<i>94%</i>
<i>no</i>	<i>6%</i>

Children

<i>Yes</i>	<i>77%</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>23%</i>

Level of schooling

<i>High school</i>	<i>56%</i>
<i>2 year associate</i>	<i>17%</i>
<i>4 year bachelor</i>	<i>14%</i>
<i>Graduate school</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Did not finish high school</i>	<i>3%</i>

<i>Employed</i>	
<i>Yes</i>	80%
<i>No</i>	20%
<i>Hours of work per week</i>	
<i>More than 40</i>	61%
<i>20 to 40</i>	31%
<i>Less than 20</i>	8%
<i>Number of uncommitted hours each week</i>	
<i>1 to 10</i>	72%
<i>10 to 20</i>	19%
<i>More than 20</i>	9%
<i>Currently volunteer for other organizations</i>	
<i>No</i>	64%
<i>Yes</i>	36%

This profile leads one to believe that an even number of males and females responded. A large percentage of respondents were married people who have recently moved to the City of La Center and own the home in which they live. Most have children. A very large percentage of people answering the survey work at least 40 hours a week with less than 20 hours of uncommitted free time. Ninety-seven percent have completed high school with 41% going on to a higher education level. Finally, approximately two-thirds do not currently volunteer for any organization.

The second page of the survey gave 15 different items that might encourage a person to join a volunteer fire department. People filling out the survey could choose more than one item. The results listed below start with the item most often chosen and continue to the item least chosen. Although 76 surveys were returned, the data below is based on only 70 surveys as six surveys were returned with no items marked on the second page.

Enjoy helping others	70%
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Community pride	39%
Interest in emergency medical field	37%
Interest in public service	30%
Enjoy team work	24%
Potential career	11%
Know someone in a fire department	10%
Excitement and danger	9%
Members of family volunteer	6%
Looks good on a resume	6%
Influenced by current department	6%
Benefits i.e., life and disability insurance	4%
Public recognition	3%
Expense reimbursement	3%
Uniforms	1%

A separate question on page two asked whether the person responding would consider joining a volunteer fire department. Twenty-eight (42%) of the people answering the survey said they would join and 38 (58%) said they would not join. Of the people who said they would join, one person asked to be contacted with additional information.

(See Appendix B for actual survey numbers)

DISCUSSION

The profile page of the study revealed interesting profiles of the people responding. Since the survey was mailed randomly, it was assumed that a broad sampling of the people living in La Center received a survey. Judging from the number of surveys returned (75), many people either did not take the time to return the survey or did not want to return the survey. It appeared that a certain group of people were more apt to fill out and return the survey. New residents to the city returned the survey at

a rate of 3 to 1. The ratio of homeowners to non-homeowners was 17 to 1. A large portion of those returning surveys were married with children.

These profiles lead toward the conclusion that people who returned the survey were more inclined to be young to middle aged families who have recently purchased homes in La Center. An earlier mentioned profile of La Center ties these families to a new, large subdivision in the city.

This leads to the possibility that long time residents are not as inclined to answer this survey as are newer residents. This could further lead to the notion that newer residents are more interested in government service levels than people who have lived in La Center for many years.

This would contradict earlier thoughts on community involvement in the fire service. As was stated in the background section, in years past, the community stepped forward to provide volunteers for the department. They were always there when needed. It is possible that with the large influx of new residents into La Center, the older residents are stepping back from their community responsibilities.

Another possibility exists that older residents are still as committed to the community but are not as apt to express their views. They may be happy with existing services and not see the need for more volunteer firefighters.

It was interesting that an equal number of males and females answered the survey. This would run counter to the macho, male image of firefighters that prevailed only a few years ago. With females working their way into both the paid and volunteer ranks, the days of a male dominated profession appear to be changing. Finally, by a ratio of almost 2 to 1, most people answering the survey do not presently donate any volunteer service to any organization. This may place some bias on the reasons

chosen to become a volunteer. People who do not presently volunteer may not give as accurate of a profile of reasons to join as a person who does volunteer.

When the previously mentioned survey asked people to list reasons they would volunteer for a fire department, the number one reason chosen was that the respondent enjoyed helping others. The National Volunteer Firefighter Council and the United States Fire Administration (1993) report also found this to be a key reason why a person volunteers for a fire department. Walker (1986) agrees when she points out that people volunteer because they are doing something to help someone. Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt (1984) place many people into a category they call “servers”. These people have a need to serve others. Volunteering often fulfills this need.

The National Volunteer Fire Council and the United States Fire Administration (1993) stress that people have a need to belong to something important. Volunteering allows them to help the community. It gives them a sense of pride in their communities. Survey responders identified pride in their community as the second most often reason chosen for volunteering for a fire department.

Although an expressed interest in the emergency medical field ranked third highest on the survey, none of the research material indicated that this was a reason a person would volunteer for a fire department. One could possibly interpret research material referring to learning new skills, helping others, or gaining new experiences as pertaining to this survey item but there was no specific mention of the medical field.

The survey shares Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt’s (1984) views that volunteering provides an opportunity to contribute to the needs of the community. Interest in public service was the fourth most often chosen item on the survey. That interest in public service was rated fourth highest supports White’s (1997) statement that many volunteer organizations are composed of citizens who like to serve

their communities. The National Volunteer Fire Council and the United States Fire Administration (1993) agree that people join to help their communities. Stewart (1982) concludes that people volunteer to serve their communities because they feel they can improve the level of service in their community.

While many of those surveyed chose public service as an important reason to volunteer, Bennett and Nunn (1998) indicate that many of us no longer have the time, ability, nor interest to perform public service. There appears to be a conflict here between the survey responses and the findings of Bennett and Nunn.

Survey respondents chose team work as the fifth highest reason to volunteer. This directly ties to Connery's (1990) statement that people join organizations that are teams. Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt (1984) point out that people search for interaction with other adults; interaction that allows them to work with the people in a team setting.

The sixth most chosen reason for joining a volunteer fire department was the potential for a career. This choice also relates to the lessor chosen reason that volunteering would look good on a resume. MacLeod (1993) believes that volunteering gives people new experiences, personal development, and new skills all of which may lead to career contacts. Forces from inside a person often drive them to volunteer. They see this as a chance to learn new skills, help them get ahead at work, and possible get a job. (Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt, 1984)

One can see a minor conflict between Brudney's (1990) belief that the best source of recruitment comes from those who share a positive experience with others and the survey's ranking on knowing someone currently in a department or being influenced by the current department. While Brudney rates this as a primary reason that someone would be influenced to join, the survey indicates

that being influenced in this manner ranks relatively low with only 6% and 10% respectively of respondents choosing this as a reason.

Excitement and danger ranked near the middle of reasons chosen in the survey. Mitchell (1986) gives a potential reason for this lower rating when he points out that firefighters have a set of personality traits that are different from the average person. Firefighters are action oriented people who like quick results. They work well with their hands and are easily bored. They are a proud group who enjoy taking risks but wish to be in control at all times. It is possible that, of the people answering the survey, only people with these personality traits considered excitement and danger as a reason to join a volunteer fire department. Stewart (1982) argues that most people would not freely give their time to one of the most hazardous occupations in our society. He then counters with his views that most people get excited by approaching lights and sirens. They associate firefighters with exciting images of macho people rescuing victims from burning buildings. The above profile-limiting factor could also explain Mitchell's (1986) belief that firefighters seek public recognition and the survey's low ranking of public recognition.

The National Volunteer Fire Council and the United States Fire Administration (1993) believe that many people join a volunteer fire department because it is a tradition in their family. Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt (1984) mimes this with their statement that volunteer service is a tradition in many families. It is expected. On the survey only 6% of people answering chose this as a reason to volunteer for a fire department. If only people who currently have another family member in a department were surveyed, this may have shown up as a more insignificant reason.

On the surveys one does not find money (reimbursement) chosen as a reason to join a volunteer fire department until the second to last reason. This ties directly to Buckman's (1998) opinion that most

people do not volunteer for the money. “Volunteering is not aimed at material gain.” (Brundney, 1990, p. 142) “It is not for the pay.” (Walker, 1986, p. 9) In ranking reasons for joining, the fourth reason from the bottom, benefits i.e., life and disability insurance, further reflects that people do not join for material gain.

An interesting after thought would be Brudney’s (1990) notion that while volunteers expect to give their time for free, they do not anticipate having to pay for this privilege. Agency policies that provide a reimbursement for expenses will help lessen the “cost” of volunteering.

Finally, we come to uniforms, an item of influence only chosen by one survey responder. There was no research material to contradict the notion that people do not join volunteer fire departments because of the opportunity to wear uniforms.

The research survey shows that while there are numerous reasons a person might have to join a volunteer fire department, five reasons are chosen significantly more often than the others. All of these reasons tie into helping or serving others. In fact “helping others” was chosen by over two-thirds of the respondents.

These top four reasons all deal with a “good feeling”. None of these align with the basic needs of life. They do not provide the respondent something to eat, somewhere to stay, or clothing to wear. They are not necessary for the respondent's survival. They are instead reasons that help other people and make for a better community. They improve other people’s lives. They may help other people survive.

It is interesting that only 11% of the survey responders indicated they would join as a potential career. There is general agreement amongst many in the fire service that the greatest number of new

volunteers are volunteering as the first step toward a career. It is possible these survey results are biased as most people answering the survey were already working full time.

In line with the literature review, very few respondents chose benefits or expense reimbursements as reasons to join. People do not see benefits or money as a reason to join volunteer fire departments. These are lower needs they have already satisfied in their lives.

One would assume that knowing someone currently serving in a fire department would have a significant influence on a potential volunteer. By interpreting the results of this survey, this does not appear to be the case. Once again there may be a possible bias in the survey. If the person being surveyed did not currently know someone in a volunteer department, it may be hard for them to relate this as a relevant reason to join a department.

Television and the movies still influence some potential volunteers. Almost one out of ten people chose danger and excitement as reasons to join. One can only speculate that Rescue 911, Emergency, Backdraft, and a variety of other shows about the lives and duties of firefighters influence people's perception of what it is like to be a firefighter.

The most prominent implication of this research is that there are people living in the La Center community who would consider joining a volunteer fire department. This gives CCFD 12 a challenge of finding these people and allowing them to volunteer their times and talents to the district. With the district's growing emphasis on EMS services, the district must tap those four people out of ten who expressed an interest in the medical field. That people often chose helping others and public service as reasons to volunteer ties strongly to CCFD 12's service ethics. The district needs to sell these issues more strongly in their next recruiting campaign.

Research and literature reviews throw up several “red flags” for the district. People drawn by red lights and sirens may not be the best candidates for a department with strong emphases on citizen service. These volunteers may find their time and energy more focused on the excitement with less time left over for the unglamorous tasks of public education, citizen wellness, and the daily grind required to keep a department in a state of readiness.

Referring to the literature review, the district may wish to not concentrate on people who just need something to do. The district may wish to focus on the more active potential volunteers. It follows that an individual who presently has nothing going on in their life may end up as volunteer with no direction or drive. Would it not be better to concentrate on the free time of a motivated person? Would not quality take a department further than quantity?

The district needs to remember that people’s lives change. They marry, have children, and change jobs. With a change of occupations or birth of a child, an excellent perspective volunteer may turn into a training problem six months in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CCFD 12 needs to review and re-evaluate its volunteer program. The district should define exactly what is expected of a volunteer. They must outline minimum time and skill requirements. Once the district does this, they should devise a more focused recruitment strategy and specific tactics to support these strategies. This may mean the district will have to change some of its past recruiting practices. As Emrich (1982) points out, fire departments need to develop new techniques to deal with the ever changing way of people’s lives. Johnson et al. (1998) agree that we are in competition for volunteers. We need to know why people would be attracted to our department.

As a strategy, the district may want to concentrate on the most stable people. They should spend more effort on homeowners and less on renters. The district should seek out those people in La Center who are employed and have uncommitted time on their hands. They should not spend as much time seeking out unemployed residents. These people may cause the district's recruiting to appear successful but may prove to be short time volunteers. It is probable that they will either find a job that may take them away from the area or that they are unskilled or unmotivated and would not prove to be good volunteers in a service oriented department. Johnson et al. (1998) maintain that as many as 50% of a recruit class drop out by the end of the class. Selective recruiting may improve this statistic.

There are two groups of citizens on which the district may wish to spend more recruitment time. First, the district may not be using the full potential of female volunteers. An equal number of males and females responded to the survey. Following the profile established on page one of the survey, there are additional females in La Center who would make good volunteers.

The second group of potential recruits may lie in the schools. The survey profile shows that very few young people answered the survey. "The most under-used volunteer resource in most communities are the young and old...both groups have a lot to offer." (Johnson et al., 1998, p. 31) The literature review stated that one reason people volunteer is for a career potential. The survey showed that only a few people chose this as a reason to volunteer. While these two seem to contradict each other, it is highly probable that the type of individuals looking for a career did not answer this survey. Had there been a larger response from younger people, the survey should have reflected a larger number of people choosing a potential career as a reason to volunteer. The district should develop a program in the high schools that targets young adults. Granted, these will not be life long volunteers but, if properly selected, should produce highly motivated volunteers for two to three years.

The district needs to revise its once-a-year “shotgun” approach to recruiting. Two months preceding the start of the district recruit school, the district does a mass mailing seeking volunteers. Judging from the return on this survey, this mass mailing appears to be an inefficient use of time and money. If the district wishes to continue a mailing, they would be better served concentrating on the new subdivision in town.

Following the literature review, there are three other recruiting tactics on which the district should concentrate. First, face to face contact lets potential volunteers know that they are important to the district. Working closely with this face to face contact is the goal of having current volunteers be the people making this contact. “The best sources for recruitment are volunteers who share positive experiences with others.” (Brudney, 1990, p. 159) As Zimmer-Loew (1989) reminds us potential volunteers often react positively when asked to join by someone in the volunteer organization. “Every member of the fire department should always be ready and prepared to get names and phone numbers of potential volunteer firefighters.” (Johnson et al., 1998, p. 32) The district needs to develop a plan that allows their volunteers the opportunity to spend quality personal contact with potential volunteers.

A third recruiting tactic for the district would be recruiting within families of current members. Several writings in the reviewed literature identify that many volunteers come from families of current volunteers. Volunteering is often a family tradition.

Another strategy the district may wish to pursue is to increase the pool of potential volunteers. There may be ways to re-energize civic pride. It is possible the district should spend more time selling their own image. Community skill demonstrations would show the team concept that is so important within a fire department. Teamwork was the fourth most often chosen reason for volunteering. Interest

in the emergency medical field ranked third in reasons to volunteer. It would be easy to provide EMS simulations at community fairs and school functions.

The district needs to be very visible in La Center. Everyone in town must to identify with and be proud of their department. Current members need to always represent the district well at both emergencies and town events, dressing and acting in a professional way. Johnson et al. (1998) points out that how members speak, act, and look will have an impact on all citizens' perception of the department. Firefighters in CCFD 12 can never forget that the public's eyes are on them at all times.

If the district or any other person wishes to do further research on reasons citizens might volunteer, they should change the survey process. While mailing a survey is time efficient, the return on the survey is not adequate. Too many people did not take the time or effort to fill out and return their surveys. It is possible that one could produce a more accurate survey through personal contact with those being surveyed.

If the person doing the survey selected 50 random homes and then physically visited every home, they should access two to three people of volunteer age in each home. This would allow two-way communication. People are usually willing to spend a few minutes talking to someone from the fire department. A spin-off of this could be that the person performing the survey may find prospective volunteers.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Volunteer Survey

August 1998

Dear La Center Resident:

I am the chief of Clark County Fire District #12, the department currently serving your city. I need your help.

I am currently enrolled in a four year executive development program at the National Fire Academy. As a part of my program, I will complete four research papers. This is part of my first paper. I am attempting to identify reasons a person would volunteer for a fire department. I plan on using this research to assist the district in recruiting future volunteers for our department. This paper will also be available to other departments across the nation.

Would any person in your home 16 years or older please take a few minutes to fill out the enclosed questionnaire. I need as many responses as possible. Yours is very important to me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Larry Bartel
Chief Clark #12

p.s. If you have a personal interest in volunteering for our department, please stop by our main station at 26506 NE 10th Ave and see what is available for you.

WHY PEOPLE VOLUNTEER FOR THE FIRE SERVICE

Please answer the following survey questions as honestly as you can. Your survey will be combined with other surveys from the City of La Center in an attempt to better understand why a resident from the City of La Center would volunteer for the fire department. Please feel free to copy this survey and give it to anyone else in your household who is 16 years or older. When completed, please mail the survey back in the enclosed envelope.

1. How long have you lived in La Center? ___less than 5 years
 ___more than 5 years
2. How old are you? ___16 to 21 ___22 to 40 ___older than 40
3. What is your sex? ___female ___male
4. Are you married? ___yes ___no
5. Do you own the home in which you presently live? ___yes ___no
6. Do you have any children? ___yes ___no
7. Which level of schooling have you completed?

Did not complete high school _____

High school _____

Two year associate degree _____

Four year bachelor degree _____

Graduate or above _____

8. Are you employed? _____yes _____no

How many hours a week do you normally work? ____<20 ____20 to 40 ____>40

9. How much uncommitted time do you have each week? ____0-10 hours
____10-20 hours
____ more than 20 hours
10. Do you volunteer for any other organizations? ____yes ____no

Please choose the reason(s) that would encourage you to volunteer for a fire department. You may choose more than one reason.

- ☐ Potential Career
- ☐ Community Pride
- ☐ Interest in the Emergency Medical Field
- ☐ Public Recognition
- ☐ The Excitement and Danger
- ☐ Interested in Public Service
- ☐ Other Members of your Family Currently Volunteer
- ☐ Expense Reimbursement
- ☐ Uniforms
- ☐ Enjoy Team-work
- ☐ Know Someone Currently in a Fire Department
- ☐ Benefits such as Life Insurance or Disability Insurance
- ☐ Looks Good on a Resume
- ☐ Enjoy Helping People
- ☐ Influenced by the Department Currently Serving You

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- ☐ I would consider volunteering for my local fire department
- ☐ I would not consider volunteering for my local fire department.

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APPENDIX B

Sample Volunteer Survey Results

Please choose the reason(s) that would encourage you to volunteer for a fire department. You may choose more than one reason.

 8 Potential Career

 27 Community Pride

 26 Interest in the Emergency Medical Field

 2 Public Recognition

 6 The Excitement and Danger

 21 Interested in Public Service

 4 Other Members of your Family Currently Volunteer

 2 Expense Reimbursement

 1 Uniforms

 17 Enjoy Team-work

 7 Know Someone Currently in a Fire Department

 3 Benefits such as Life Insurance or Disability Insurance

 4 Looks Good on a Resume

 49 Enjoy Helping People

 4 Influenced by the Department Currently Serving You

=====

 28 I would consider volunteering for my local fire department

 38 I would not consider volunteering for my local fire department.

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